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SOCIOLOGICAL INFLUENCES ON THE ACHIEVEMENT OF LOWER CLASS NEGRO CHILDREN. FINAL REPORT.

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAMILY, SCHOOL, AND COMMUNITY AS INFLUENCES ON ACHIEVEMENT OF LOWER-CLASS NEGROES WERE STUDIED IN AN ALL-NEGRO SUBURB OF A LARGE NORTHERN CITY. THESE VARIABLES WERE EXAMINED WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF CURRENT HYPOTHESES OFFERED IN THE LITERATURE ON CULTURAL DISADVANTAGE. THE FOCUS OF THE STUDY WAS ON THREE RESEARCH AREAS--(1) FAMILY BACKGROUND FACTORS WHICH MIGHT SUPPORT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, (2) THE ROLE OF SOCIAL DISTANCE VARIABLES IN SCHOOL-FAMILY INTERACTION, AND (3) THE DEGREE TO WHICH SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND "SCHOOL POLITICS" AFFECT ACHIEVEMENT. THE DATA, OBTAINED THROUGH QUESTIONNAIRES, INTERVIEWS, SCHOOL RECORDS, AND INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS, INDICATED THAT SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES WERE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT PREDICTORS OF ACHIEVEMENT. THE DATA DID NOT SUPPORT THE CAUSAL THEORIES ON SCHOOL-FAMILY RELATIONS PROPOSED IN THE LITERATURE. RATHER, THE FINDINGS SUGGESTED THAT EDUCATIONAL ISSUES SHOULD BE STUDIED WITHIN A SPECIFIC SOCIAL STRUCTURAL CONTEXT. (NH)

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Robert James Parelius

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

November 1967

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The successful completion of this research depended upon the cooperation and contributions of many individuals and groups. Without the initial consent of the school board of Low Water, the project could not have begun. The boards continuing support throughout the study was invaluable. The Institute for Juvenile Research furnished important financial and technical assistance. Special thanks go to Daniel Solomon of the organization for his encouragement and advice. Most of the direct supervision of the research was undertaken by David Street and Morris Janowitz of the Center for the Study of Social Organizations at the University of Chicago. Professor Street has been importantly involved in the project from the initial application for funds to the submission of this final report. He acted successfully as teacher and friend throughout. Much of what is good about this research is due to his influence. The weak points, however, remain the responsibility of the principal investigator.

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INTRODUCTION:

Initially, this study, which developed a broad focus, was to concentrate only on how the sociological characteristics of Negro families affected the childrens' school performance and perspectives. Social scientists from many fields have had something to say about the causes of poor educational achievement among lower class Negro children. A large amount of material on the subject has appeared in the last few years (1, 10, 11, 15, 14), but little of a conclusive nature has emerged from these studies. The lack of balance between theory and research provided the impetus to this study.

In particular, much has been written on the "cultural deprivation" of the Negro child and the effect this phenomenon presumably has on his academic achievement. In general the social scientists seemed to agree that the family background of the child was especially important. For example: Drake and Cayton (4) pointed out that within a lower class community, differences between the "respectable" lower class and the "underworld" characters might prove important; Dave (3) suggested that family procedures for socializing their children to achievement might have a dramatic effect upon achievement and he produced very strong results to back up this theory; Kahl (6) investigated dimensions of "achievement orientation"--attitudes and values which might be central in the promotion of achievement; and Weiner and Murray (16) studied parental attitudes about the value of education as well as educational aspirations and expectations for their children. In addition, I have felt that the area of racial socialization--how parents approach the task of explaining the racial facts of life to their children--deserved more notice than has been accorded previously.

The research program was to test the hypotheses already suggested in the literature, using data from school records, child questionnaires and parent interviews. Originally it was planned to conduct the research within an inner-city neighborhood but problems of access led to a shift in site to a virtually all-Negro suburb of a northern metropolis. As the study progressed, it soon became evident that the problem of underachievement, at least in this village, lay in the larger surroundings and could not fully be studied in the limited context of the family and child alone. Thus the areas of school-family relations and school-community relations were added to the study.

There have been several studies (5, 9, 12) concerning the hypothesis that one prerequisite of high educational achievement in lower class Negro communities is extensive contact and co-operation between the family and the school. Once this sort of intensive interaction between home and school is established, it is hypothesized, the two organizations will be able to coordinate their activities in such a way as to maximize achievement. This theory alone is not sufficient, however, for it lacks good empirical documentation and ignores many basic characteristics of the structure of the school and family.

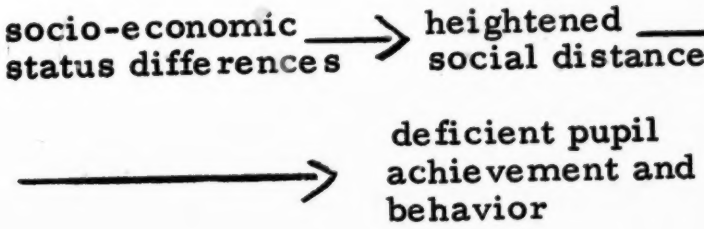
Selznick(13) has pointed out that the maintenance of organizational integrity and the development and functioning of boundary roles and boundary organizations are involved in the area of school-family relations, and Litwak and Meyer (7) have pointed out that special difficulties arise in such programs due to the fundamental difference between the bureaucratic nature of the school and the primary group characteristics of the family. Sexton (14) has pointed out that social status differences are likely to hinder the free exchange of information necessary for the establishment of the type of co-operation proposed between family and school.

During the course of the collection of data on the school-family relations, certain compelling facts emerged which broadened the research task even more. It became evident that the topic of school-community relations was a potent one in the community and deserved inclusion in the study not only because of indications evident in the course of interviews with teachers, but also because of the fact that "Low Water" (the community studied) was located on the rural-urban fringe and its problems might well be tied into the strains of incorporating a rural town into the outlying reaches of a sprawling metropolis.

Three research areas, therefore, made up the body of the project. In the first area, family support for academic achievement, five specific aspects of family background were investigated as potential influences upon achievement: (1) Preschool learning; (2) Parental values and attitudes relevant to achievement; (3) Racial socialization procedures; (4) Physical aspects of the home environment, and; (5) Family activities designed to encourage achievement.

In the second area, school-family relations, the problem was to determine how well day-to-day interactions between

the school and family were described by a model developed in the cultural deprivation literature (5, 9). This model suggests that one reason achievement is low in poverty-stricken areas is that little contact, communication and co-operation occurs between the school and the family. The parents and teachers are separated by substantial social distance characterized by fear, suspicion, or even outright hostility. This social distance is supposed to be rooted in the social class or racial differences between parents and teachers. The causal model which is implied by this approach may be drawn as follows:



Only anecdotal evidence had been given in support of the model. It seemed problematic primarily because it failed to take into account basic structural characteristics of the family and the school.

The third area was school-community relations and school politics, which appeared to be especially important because certain groups within the community were highly critical of the schools and their actions toward the school were colored by their hostility. A great deal of conflict and controversy centered around the major structural link between the community and the schools--the school board. It seemed likely that a full understanding of this conflict would be a key to an understanding of the social structure of the community and its effects upon education.

METHOD:

The small Negro community where the study was conducted was within easy commuting distance of Midwest Metropolis. To preserve its anonymity, and to reflect the primary characteristic of the community, the pseudonym of Low Water was chosen. Understanding the community is a prerequisite to understanding the research design. The community is a "pocket of poverty!" A recent study which ranked all the suburbs of Midwest Metropolis in terms of prestige and social status placed Low Water next to the lowest out of 106 communities. The major part of the village looks much like farm towns in the rural portions

of Mississippi and Georgia. There are dirt roads, tar-paper shacks with no running water, and abandoned cars throughout the center of the village. Yet on its periphery are three developments of low-cost private homes which have attracted working class Negroes from Midwest Metropolis. Thus, the community is both a semi-rural pocket of poverty and a working class suburb.

Thirty years ago Low Water was a very small farm town with a dominant white population which controlled the town. With the advent of World War II, streams of Negroes began to migrate from the South in search of work in the factories. From 1940 on, the minority groups began to grow and as they did so, the white population began to leave. By 1950 virtually the entire village was populated by minority group persons. The leadership positions in the community, with the exception of superintendant of schools, were all filled by Negroes. At about 1950 corruption is said to have started in the community. Although nothing has ever been proven in a court of law, there have been numerous allegations of underhanded dealings involving both the village government and the school district.

In 1960 both public and private housing developments came to Low Water. The private housing developments which attracted working class Negroes from Midwest Metropolis were built. While many of the new residents live close to the margin, and some have failed to keep up their payments and have had to move back to the city, the major proportion of these new residents consider Low Water a suburb--a place to which they came at least partly to improve the lives of their children. As they became active in community affairs, they soon became convinced that Low Water was thoroughly inefficient, backward and corrupt. Some left, but many accepted the community or decided to fight for reform. Thus a split was created between the Oldtimers, who were opposed to the Reformers, and the Reformers, who were joined by a few of the long time residents.

Familial Support for Achievement:

Data on familial support for achievement were gathered from three major sources: the interviews with the 201 mothers of fourth and sixth grade children in the local schools; questionnaires filled out by the children themselves; and school records. The interviews with the mothers were conducted by working class Negro women in the homes of the respondents. The major topics covered were the social background of the family and its actions

and attitudes regarding the community, its schools, and education in general. These interviews were quite extensive and included both open and closed ended questions. Over 90 percent of the mothers of children in the two school grades were interviewed. The pupil questionnaires were completed by 353 children and consisted of one hundred "yes" and "no" items. These items were designed to gather information about attitudes and values as well as additional data about the home environment. The school records furnished grades, and achievement and intelligence test scores which served as dependent variables. In placing these respondents in the larger context of Low Water, two dimensions--length of residence and economic well-being--were made and analysed. Those who settled in the community before 1960 were referred to as the Oldtimers. For the "welfare ratio" we followed Morgan (8) in distinguishing the poor from the others by defining the poor as those having a welfare ratio of .9 or less. An additional cutting point of .5 or less was used to separate the truly destitute from the rest of the poor.

There were two major steps in the analysis of these data. First, simple cross-tabulations were used to discover how familial support for achievement varied within the social structure of the community. In order to ascertain the importance of six sets of family background variables upon achievement, a series of multiple regression analyses was performed. First, each of the sets of variables were regressed as a group upon the achievement measures. Thus, multiple correlation coefficients were determined which served as indicators of the predictive power of each group as a group. Then the variables within each group which had contributed significantly to the regression equation were selected and pooled into new sets. Then these sets, representing the most powerful predictors of each dependent variable, were regressed against the achievement measures. This last procedure made it possible to ascertain the relative importance of the variables under each heading and the total predictive power of these variables in combination.

School-Family Relations:

To study school-family relations, we relied heavily upon informal conversations with teachers and also upon a brief questionnaire which they completed. The questionnaire dealt with the nature and extent of contacts which the teachers had had with the parents of each of their students during

the year. Some data from the interviews with the mothers were also useful.

School-Community Relations and School Politics:

School-community relations and school politics were examined by extensive semi-structured interviews with community actors on both sides of the major school conflict. In addition, interviews with the present and past superintendents of schools and with other school personnel provided significant insights. Sixteen persons associated with social service agencies concerned with Low Water were also interviewed. Newspaper articles and school board election documents provided still other sources of data. Finally, a quick follow-up survey of the mothers in the sample was conducted in order to ascertain their voting patterns in school elections.

RESULTS:

The first findings were on the social structure of the community. When the two variables were combined, six statistical categories emerged in describing the social structure of Low Water:

Welfare Ratio

length of residence		moderate	low	very low
	less than seven years	working class Newcomers (New Workers)	poor New-comers	destitute New-comers
	seven years or more	working class Oldtimers (Old Workers)	poor Old-timers	destitute Old-timers

This typology largely organizes the significant variations in numerous social background characteristics which exist in the community. Families were very large and the number of children varied inversely with economic welfare. Newcomers tended to have smaller families. Regardless of length of residence, broken homes were concentrated among the very poorest residents. Most of the destitute families were Oldtimers. The destitute Oldtimers were almost totally rural in background, while the New Workers were the most urban group. Oldtimers were less likely to be recent migrants from the South, and recency of migration was related slightly to economic well-being.

Two facts stood out concerning objective measures of socio-economic status. Newcomers were not consistently higher than the Oldtimers on any of the measures of socio-economic status; thus, being new to the community could not automatically be equated with financial well-being. It was also apparent that the welfare ratio was closely related to traditional measures of socio-economic status.

Two subjective measures of the family's social position were also used. Following Centers (2), class identification was measured. The majority at all levels identified themselves as working class. There was some variation with the welfare ratio--among the destitute the Newcomers were more willing to admit belonging to the lower class and less likely to identify themselves as middle class than the Oldtimers. On the measure which asked how well they felt life was going for them, New Workers almost unanimously reported that things had been getting better--more so than among the Oldtimers--while the reverse was true among the Destitute.

Concerning adaptation to the community as a whole, satisfaction varied with socio-economic status among Newcomers but not among Oldtimers. New Workers were the most satisfied although this could be interpreted as satisfaction with the housing development rather than with the community as a whole. New Workers stood out as the most integrated into the community while the destitute Newcomers were the least integrated. Kinship played a part in this, however, for the Oldtimers were more likely than Newcomers to have relatives in Low Water. The likelihood of kinship in the community was high in all parts of the social structure, however. All three of these variables were systematically related to economic well-being among the Newcomers, but not among the Oldtimers. Those Newcomers with adequate incomes were most satisfied with Low Water and most closely tied into a neighboring pattern there. On the other hand, Newcomers who were poor or destitute had more relatives there but were still lower on satisfaction and integration into the neighborhood.

The children of the high status Newcomers were the most likely to show evidence of substantial pre-school learning, to have parents who had high educational expectations, and to have come from homes with some physical advantages and within which some achievement-promoting activities were common. On the other hand, the parents

of these children had relatively weak achievement orientations and tended to have racial attitudes which were thought unlikely to promote achievement. Furthermore, the superiority of these families in terms of advantages of the physical environment and intellectually stimulating activities was far from complete. However, many of the homes of the most destitute Oldtimers offered considerable support for achievement, and when asked how much education they would like their children to have, over 80 percent of all mothers said they would like to have their children go to college. The expectation that the collegiate experience would actually be achieved varied directly with the economic welfare of the families.

The data failed to support any of the links in the causal chain regarding school-family relations proposed in the cultural deprivation literature. Social class was found not to be related to social distance between school and family in the way suggested, and social distance proved to be largely unrelated to contacts. School-initiated contact was found to have a strong negative relationship with achievement, and parent-initiated contact was found to have a very weak relationship in the same direction. Furthermore, the causal direction appeared to be from achievement to contact rather than the reverse.

The school politics of Low Water were found to center around control of the school board. It was concluded that the conflict could be viewed as a struggle between the two major social groups, the Oldtimers and the Reformers, for the prestige, power, and authority associated with membership in the major boundary organization between the families and the schools of the community.

DISCUSSION:

Familial Support for Achievement:

Few results came from the 100 item "yes" and "no" questionnaire filled out by the children in the classrooms. The questions were read aloud by an articulate woman while her husband went about the class answering questions as they arose. The instrument was designed to yield detailed information about familial achievement socialization and the educational and occupational attitudes, aspirations, and expectations of the children. Despite the care in development, pretesting and administration of the questionnaire it appears to have been largely a failure. When the items

were factor analyzed, a large number of very small factors emerged, but careful examination of the inter-correlations between very similar test items revealed very low and sometimes negative correlations. It appeared as if the children had answered randomly. Hence, some factual data on family characteristics from the questionnaire was used, but attitude data were deleted due to their apparent low reliability.

As a group, social and demographic variables were found to be the most important predictors of achievement. However, these and other concrete factors declined in importance from the fourth to the sixth grade, while parental attitudes and values increased in importance.

School-Family Relations:

These findings were reinterpreted in terms of another theoretical framework. This approach emphasized the fact that both the schools and the families are social organizations and that, as such, they have boundaries, internal dynamics, and limited resources which can be applied to the solution of organizational problems. Both systems are at least minimally committed to a common goal, the promotion of high achievement within the younger generation. In addition, both organizations recognize the importance of co-operating to achieve this common end. However, they both also share the feature that contact and communication between parent and teacher may pose a threat to their boundaries and organizational integrity. Given a situation characterized by potential costs and very uncertain rewards, under normal conditions both the school and the family tend to avoid, or at least not to seek, contact. However, when the child's achievement and/or behavior is much poorer than the expectations of the parent or teacher, a conference is called. Usually this contact is initiated by the school, but sometimes the parents seek conferences on their own. The high status Newcomers were found to be much more likely than others to seek such contact and much less likely to have been called in by the teachers to school for a conference.

School-Community Relations and School Politics:

The school politics of Low Water had four distinct historical stages: (1) a period of concensus, stability and rumors of corruption; (2) the reformist take-over; (3) the resurgence of the Oldtimers; and (4) the demoralization of the Reformers. The Reformers saw the Oldtimer-

dominated board as a threat to the organizational integrity of the school system. This threat was alleged to have resulted from financial wrongdoings and from domination of the superintendent by the board. On the other hand, the Oldtimers viewed the Reformers as a potential threat to the schools, the families, and the school board itself. The Reformists were thought to be spendthrifts who squandered money on educational frills and thereby put a heavy financial burden on the schools and, ultimately, the individual families within the community. The Reformist superintendent had, in their view, usurped the traditional and legitimate powers of the board. Finally, some Oldtimers apparently sincerely felt that the Reformers were power-hungry Communists and Communist dupes.

On the whole, the study showed that educational affairs must be studied in their particular social structural context. In Low Water, economic status was not the only important social structural variable. The differences between the Oldtimers and Newcomers in terms of their attitudes toward the community and toward its educational system proved central to understanding educational affairs in Low Water. In other communities, racial, ethnic, generational or religious cleavages might prove central.

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The over-all conclusion of the study is that in order to understand the dynamics of education in Low Water it is necessary to understand its social structure. The major findings, therefore, emphasize the importance of viewing educational affairs in their community context. In addition, they have implications for sociological theory and research as well as for policy directions.

The children of high status Newcomers were the most likely to show evidence of preschool learning, to have parents who had high educational expectations, and to have come from homes with some physical advantages and within which some achievement-promoting behaviors were common. On the other hand, the parents of these children had relatively low achievement orientations (as measured by a scale given in Kahl [6]) and tended to have racial attitudes which were thought unlikely to promote achievement. Furthermore, the superiority of these homes in terms of physical accoutrements and intellectually stimulating activities was far from complete. Over eighty percent of the mothers said they would like their children to go to college.

Virtually every destitute mother in Low Water had collegiate aspirations for her child, but relatively few expected these hopes to be fulfilled. It was found that many homes of the destitute Oldtimers offered considerable support for achievement.

It was also found, that as a group, social and demographic variables were the most important predictors of achievement. However, these and other concrete factors declined in importance from the fourth to the sixth grade while parental attitudes and values increased in importance.

The causal model concerning family-school relations and achievements was found to be inadequate. Social class was shown not to be related to social distance in the way suggested and social distance was found to be largely unrelated to contact. Finally, contact was found to be negatively related to achievement, with the causal direction being the reverse of that which was hypothesized. These findings were reinterpreted in the light of organization theory, realizing that both the schools and the families are social organizations and that as such they have boundaries, internal dynamics, and limited resources which can be applied to the solution of organizational problems. In order to co-operate with each other, but not break down the boundaries that exist, the school and the families support a boundary organization--the Parent-Teachers association--and a boundary role--the school social worker. Given the potential costs and uncertain rewards of close relations, both the family and the school tend to avoid contacts wherever possible. Whenever there was a serious problem, usually the teacher initiated a conference. These school-initiated contacts are the most common types of interaction between parents and school personnel in Low Water and both parties find them unpleasant occurences, the parent because he feels compelled to defend his child against criticisms and the teacher because he saw this reaction as another indication that most parents are apathetic and uninterested in their childrens' achievement. Parent-initiated contact was less common and less clearly related to achievement. Some schools regard this as an invasion of privacy, but in Low Water such visits are taken as evidence of the parents' interest. The Reformers were most likely to initiate such contact and the least likely to have been called in for a conference with the teacher.

Four stages in the history of the school politics were identified--(1) concensus and apathy; (2) Reformist takeover; (3) resurgence of the Oldtimers; and, (4) demoralization of the Reformers and consolidation of power by the Oldtimers. This conflict was viewed as a struggle between two major social groups for the prestige, power and authority associated with membership in the major boundary organization between the families and the schools of the community. The Reformers saw the Oldtimers as a threat to the organizational integrity of the school system. The Oldtimers viewed the Reformers as a potential threat to the schools, the families, and the school board itself.

This study should illustrate the fact that the sociology of education need not be as dull and sterile as it has been in the past. The story of Low Water's schools makes it clear that interesting and exciting events do occur in educational affairs. Still, there is practically no descriptive material on such events. Comparative case studies on the school's functioning in different communities are sorely needed. Perhaps as social scientists come to recognize some of the many theoretical implications of school-community relations, they will be spurred to go out and investigate them.

The most obvious implication in the findings of the social history of Low Water is that the social history of a community can give important insights into its present social structure. Certainly the social types, the Oldtimers and the Reformers, are best understood in an historical context. An historical viewpoint is also important in that it forces one to pay attention to long term social trends and, thus, to social change and to go out in the field and talk to people in the community. One hypothesis worth investigating is that school conflict in low-income suburban areas is due to suburbanization and the concomitant conflicts between the social groups rather than to a lack of skill in conflict management. Furthermore, it may be found that residents of poverty villages will not like their first taste of the relatively heterogenous, modern, urban society and will, therefore, reject it in favor of more socially homogeneous poverty. Thus residents of such communities would do well to consider the potential gains and costs of constructing public housing tracts to attract urbanites.

The data concerning familial support of achievement supports the general conclusion that family background has important effects upon achievement. In addition, they indicate that a family's social class is not the only one of its characteristics which is important in this regard. Its position on other dimensions of social stratification within the communitymay be important. In this study the differentiation between Oldtimers and Reformers was useful. The researcher who is interested in education in the community setting would do well to spend some time trying to find out the peculiarities of the local social structure, rather than assuming that social class is the only really important variable.

The data suggest that within social strata or social types there is considerable variation in terms of the specific ways in which the family supports education. Further research is needed to specify and measure more precisely the most important of these. Then it may prove possible to develop specific programs to help low income families realize their educational aspirations.

Also, there is considerable room for theoretical development and further research with regard to the changes in the importance and patterns of familial influence upon achievement over time. Panel studies of the relationships between physical and attitudinal characteristics and achievement are in order. Although family background has proved an important influence upon achievement, it has not come close to explaining all the variations in achievement in Low Water. More extensive work should be done in evaluating the impact of peer groups, teachers, relatives and other agencies of socialization upon achievement.

Insofar as the family background has proven to be important, governmental programs to improve the social and economic condition of depressed minority groups are likely to have a payoff in improved achievement. However, the data show that there are other influences and that there is room for the school and other agencies to promote achievement. Thus, the defeatist attitude among teachers of the culturally deprived is unjustified. Teachers should be taught that achievement is not strictly determined by social or economic status.

It appears that the social organizational framework developed here fits the day-to-day reality of school-family

relationships in depressed areas much better than that proposed by the cultural deprivation literature. Case studies of the type, extent, and effectiveness of parent-teacher interactions and school strategies regarding these in communities of varying socio-economic and racial composition are badly needed. This is an area where controlled social experiments are also possible and should be tried. If this framework proves useful in describing the dynamics of relations between schools and families in many different communities, it may also prove useful in describing the relationships between other public-serving organizations and their publics.

With regard to policy about school-family relations, it seems necessary to begin with more research to establish the conditions under which they are likely to have a favorable impact upon achievement and under which they are not. Only after these tasks have been accomplished would it seem useful to make specific policy recommendations. However, assuming that such investigations do prove school-family contacts to be important in promoting achievement, the following steps would seem appropriate: (1) establish incentives for individual teachers who have the qualifications and the desire to relate to the families to do so; (2) establish programs using school-community co-ordinators, and; (3) construct social structural safeguards against intrusion into what are considered to be the internal dynamics of the family and the school, realizing that what might be seen as interference in one community might not in another.

Investigations into school board issues are likely to yield significant insights into the central valuational and financial cleavages within the community, especially in areas like Low Water which are undergoing rapid social change. If it is true that the Oldtimers have misused their offices on the school board, it is at least partly because neither formal nor informal sanctions were applied to them. State laws could be passed which could make all school records and transactions more easily accessible to public purview. However, where the citizens are too poor, uneducated, apathetic and disorganized to exercise their option to "throw the rascals out" at the time of elections, events like those found in Low Water are likely to continue. In this community it seems likely that the Oldtimers are kept in office, despite the scandals, chiefly because they oppose the forces of urbanization, modernity

bureaucratization, liberalism, and perhaps, snobbery which the Reformers represent. In that sense they represent the will of the majority of the residents.

This raises the issue of local versus state or national control of education. One's immediate reaction to the scandals of Low Water might be to call for scrapping of local boards while increasing both state and federal control. If this were done it is quite possible that many of the scandals would disappear. At the same time, however, the major boundary organization between the family and the school would be lost. Variations between communities in terms of definition of the boundaries and vital functions of the schools and families would probably not be taken into account. Intermediate measures which would call for increased professionalization of school administration and teachers along with state and national codes would probably be the best alternative.

The full report of this study is available as a dissertation: The Schools and Social Structure of an Economically Depressed Negro Community, by Robert J. Parelius. Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, November 1967.

SUMMARY

This study was carried out in a virtually all-Negro suburb of a Northern Metropolis to determine the sociological influences on the poor achievement of lower class Negro children. We decided to test the hypotheses already suggested in the literature concerning the area of the "culturally deprived" child and the effects the family has on the child's achievement. The scope of the study was widened and the areas of school-family relations and school-community relations were added when it became apparent that in "Low Water" (the community studied) the problem lay in the larger surroundings and could not be fully studied in the limited contexts of the family and child alone.

Three research areas, therefore, made up the body of the project. In the first area--family support for academic achievement--five specific aspects of family background were investigated as potential influences upon achievement: (1) Pre-school learning; (2) Parental values and attitudes relevant to achievement; (3) Racial socialization procedures; (4) Physical aspects of the home environment, and; (5) Family activities designed to encourage achievement.

In the second area--school-family relations--the problem was to determine how well day-to-day interactions between the school and family were described by a model developed in the cultural deprivation literature (5, 9). This model suggested that one reason achievement was low was the lack of contact between family and school and suggested that social distance was rooted in the social class or racial differences between parents and teachers.

The third area was school-community relations and school politics, which appeared to be especially important because certain groups within the community were highly critical of the schools and their actions toward the schools were colored by their hostility. A great deal of conflict and controversy centered around the major structural link between the community and the schools--the school board.

The small Negro community where the study was conducted was within easy commuting distance of Midwest Metropolis. To preserve its anonymity, the pseudonym of Low Water was chosen. Understanding the community is a prerequisite to understanding the research design.

The community is a "pocket of poverty." A recent study which ranked all the suburbs of Midwest Metropolis in terms of prestige and social status placed Low Water next to the lowest out of 106 communities.

Data for familial support for achievement were gathered from three major sources: interviews with 201 mothers of fourth and sixth graders in the local schools; questionnaires filled out by the children themselves; and school records. In placing these respondents in the larger context of Low Water two dimensions--length of residence and economic well-being--were used. Those who settled in the community before 1960 were referred to as the Oldtimers, the rest as Newcomers. For the "welfare ratio" we followed Morgan (8) in distinguishing the poor from the others as those having a welfare ratio of .9 or less. An additional cutting point of .5 or less was used to separate the truly destitute from the rest of the poor.

To study school-family relations we relied heavily upon informal conversations with teachers and also upon a brief questionnaire which they completed. The questionnaire dealt with the nature and extent of contacts which the teachers had had with the parents of each of their students during the year. Some data from the interviews with the mothers were also useful.

School-community relations and school politics were examined by extensive semi-structured interviews with community actors on both sides of the major school conflict between the Oldtimers and the Reformers. In addition, interviews with the present and past superintendents of schools and with other school personnel provided significant insights. Sixteen persons associated with social service agencies concerned with Low Water were also interviewed. Newspaper articles and school board election documents provided still other sources of data. Finally, a quick follow-up survey of the mothers in the sample was conducted in order to ascertain their voting patterns in school elections.

The first findings were on the social structure of the community. When the two variables--length of residence and welfare ratio--were combined, six statistical categories emerged in describing the social structure of Low Water.

Welfare Ratio

length of Residence		moderate	low	very low
	less than seven years	working class Newcomers (New Workers)	poor New-Comers	destitute New-Comers
	seven years or more	working class Oldtimers (Old Workers)	poor Old-Timers	destitute Old-Timers

This typology largely organizes the significant variations in social background characteristics which exist in the community. Families were very large and the number of children varied inversely with economic welfare. Newcomers tended to have smaller families. Regardless of length of residence, broken homes were concentrated among the very poorest residents. Most of the destitute families were Oldtimers. The destitute Oldtimers were almost totally rural in background, while the New Workers were the most urban group. Oldtimers were less likely to be recent migrants from the South, and recency of migration was related slightly to economic well-being.

Concerning objective measures of socio-economic status, two facts stood out. Newcomers were not consistently higher than the Oldtimers on any of the measures of socio-economic status; thus, being new to the community could not automatically be equated with financial well-being. It was also apparent that the welfare ratio was closely related to traditional measures of socioeconomic status.

Two subjective measures of the family's social position were also used. Following Centers (2), class identification was measured. The majority at all levels identified itself as working class. There was some variation with the welfare ratio--among the destitute the Newcomers were more willing to admit belonging to the lower class and less likely to identify themselves as middle class than the Oldtimers. On the measure which asked how well they felt life was going for them, New Workers almost unanimously reported that things had been getting better--more so than among the Oldtimers--while the reverse was true among the Destitute.

Concerning adaptation to the community as a whole, satisfaction varied with socio-economic status among Newcomers but not among Oldtimers. New Workers were the

most satisfied, although this could be interpreted as satisfaction with the housing development rather than with the community as a whole. New Workers stood out as the most integrated into the community while the destitute Newcomers were the least integrated. Kinship played a part in this, however, for the Oldtimers were more likely than Newcomers to have relatives in Low Water. The likelihood of kinship in the community was high in all parts of the social structure, however. All three of these variables were systematically related to economic well-being among the Newcomers, but not among the Oldtimers. Those Newcomers with adequate incomes were most satisfied with Low Water and most closely tied into a neighboring pattern there. On the other hand, Newcomers who were poor or destitute had more relatives there but were still lower on satisfaction and integration into the neighborhood.

The children of the high status Newcomers were the most likely to show evidence of substantial pre-school learning, to have parents who had high educational expectations, and to have come from homes with some physical advantages and within which some achievement-promoting activities were common. On the other hand, the parents of these children had relatively weak achievement orientations and tended to have racial attitudes which were thought unlikely to promote achievement. Furthermore, the superiority of these families in terms of advantages of the physical environment and intellectually stimulating activities was far from complete. However, many of the homes of the most destitute Oldtimers offered considerable support for achievement, and when asked how much education they would like their children to have, over 80 percent of all mothers said they would like to have their children go to college. The expectation that the collegiate experience would actually be achieved varied directly with the economic welfare of the families.

Social and demographic variables were found to be the most important predictors of achievement. However, these and other concrete factors declined in importance from the fourth to the sixth grade, while parental attitudes and values increased in importance.

The data failed to support any of the links in the causal chain regarding school-family relations proposed in the cultural deprivation literature. Social class was found not

to be related to social distance between school and family in the way suggested, and social distance proved to be largely unrelated to contacts. School-initiated contact was found to have a strong negative relationship with achievement, and parent-initiated contact was found to have a very weak relationship in the same direction. Furthermore, the causal direction appeared to be from achievement to contact rather than the reverse.

These findings were reinterpreted in terms of another theoretical framework. This approach emphasized the fact that both the schools and the families are social organizations and that, as such, they have boundaries, internal dynamics, and limited resources which can be applied to the solution of organizational problems. Both systems are at least minimally committed to a common goal, the promotion of high achievement within the younger generation. In addition, both organizations recognize the importance of co-operating to achieve this common end. However, they both also share the feature that contact and communication between parent and teacher may pose a threat to their boundaries and organizational integrity. Given a situation characterized by potential costs and very uncertain rewards, under normal conditions both the school and the family tend to avoid, or at least not to seek, contact. However, when the child's achievement and/or behavior is much poorer than the expectations of the parent or teacher, a conference is called. Usually this contact is initiated by the school, but sometimes the parents seek conferences on their own. The high status Newcomers were found to be much more likely than others to seek such contact and much less likely to have been called in by the teachers to school for a conference.

The school politics of Low Water were found to center around control of the school board. It was concluded that the conflict could be viewed as a struggle between the two major social groups, the Oldtimers and the Reformers, for the prestige, power, and authority associated with membership in the major boundary organization between the families and the schools of the community.

The school politics of Low Water had four distinct historical stages: (1) a period of concensus, stability and rumors of corruption; (2) the reformist take-over; (3) the resurgence of the Oldtimers; and (4) the demoralization of the Reformers. The Reformers saw the Oldtimer-dominated board as a threat to the organizational integrity

of the school system. This threat was alleged to have resulted from financial wrongdoings and from domination of the superintendent by the board. On the other hand, the Oldtimers viewed the Reformers as a potential threat to the schools, the families, and the school board itself. The Reformists were though to be spend-thrifts who squandered money on educational frills and thereby put a heavy financial burden on the schools and, ultimately, the individual families within the community. The Reformist superintendent had, in their view, usurped the traditional and legitimate powers of the board. Finally, some Oldtimers apparently sincerely felt that the Reformers were power-hungry Communists or Communist dupes.

On the whole, the study showed that educational affairs must be studied in their particular social structural context. In Low Water, economic status was not the only important social structural variable. The differences between the Oldtimers and Newcomers in terms of their attitudes toward the community and toward its educational system proved central to understanding educational affairs in Low Water. In other communities, racial, ethnic, generational or religious cleavages might prove central.

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